

Becoming a good sport and a better performer: A social information processing view of authentic leadership

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Abstract:

Drawing on social information processing theory, this study investigates the mechanisms by which authentic leadership affects subordinate task performance through subordinate attitudes and behavior. Sportsmanship, conceptualized as a behavioral indicator of employee positivity and persistence in pursuing high performance, is argued to be a potentially important outcome for authentic leadership. Data collected from 203 matched subordinate–supervisor dyads in six organizations from six diverse industries were subjected to contrast analysis with bootstrapping. The results suggest that the indirect effect of authentic leadership on subordinate sportsmanship is mainly via a cognitive process, as opposed to an affective one. Furthermore, it is the employee’s sportsmanship that transmits the effects of authentic leadership on employee task performance. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Keywords: authentic leadership | sportsmanship | social information processing | task performance

Article:

The past decade has seen a proliferation of research on authentic leadership (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). Authentic leadership has been defined as a “pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate” (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008, p. 94). Specifically, authentic leaders display four types of behaviors: self-awareness, relational transparency, an internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Prior research has shown that authentic leadership is positively related to subordinate psychological states and behaviors, such as personal and social identification (e.g., Wong, Spence Laschinger, & Cummings, 2010), psychological capital (e.g., Woolley, Caza, & Levy, 2011), trust (e.g., Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009), job performance (e.g., Walumbwa et al., 2008), and creativity (Rego, Sousa, & Marques, 2012).

Despite clear empirical support for the positive effect of authentic leadership on subordinate work outcomes, very few studies have attempted to theoretically explicate the operative mechanisms of this particular form of leadership. Theory has not been developed to predict what

behavioral responses from subordinates are most plausible and theoretically justifiable if their leaders are perceived to be authentic, and how these behavioral responses affect organizational functioning. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to theoretically address and then empirically test the effects of authentic leadership from a social information processing perspective (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). The main argument of this theory is that salient, relevant, and credible environmental information is used to form information receivers' attitudes and to direct their subsequent behaviors through evaluation and choice processes (Zalesny & Ford, 1990). Specifically, attitudes can be formed based on perceived social context (such as leadership style) that informs what attitudes are appropriate, and behaviors are thus rationalized by referring to the contextual characteristics that support them (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Prior research on authentic leadership has supported the position that the ultimate subordinate outcome of authentic leadership is usually task performance, yet it is unclear how this occurs. In other words, our research interest is the social information processing mechanism through which authentic leadership, by signaling credible information, elicits a subordinate's specific attitude and behavior that can contribute to task performance.

We are particularly interested in sportsmanship behavior as a plausible subordinate behavioral outcome. Formerly proposed as one of several types of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), sportsmanship is conceptualized as a demonstration of willingness to tolerate less than ideal circumstances without complaining or making problems seem bigger than they actually are (Organ, 1988). From a social information processing perspective, a subordinate's display of sportsmanship would seem to be a rational behavioral choice when the leader is perceived to be authentic. Authentic leadership, by the leader's being open and honest, making decisions in a careful and balanced manner, and acting morally and not using their superior hierarchical positions and greater power for undue personal benefit, would seem to set norms and expectations that discourage subordinate overreactions. Subordinates are thus encouraged to be less sensitive to and more tolerant of problems and undesirable circumstances, and to remain more work-focused.

Our choice of the attitudinal reactions to authentic leadership as psychological mechanisms linking authentic leadership and subordinate sportsmanship is also driven by a social information processing perspective. This perspective maintains that social context can influence attitudes by making certain aspects of the environment more salient so as to call an information receiver's attention (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Authentic leadership provides social cues about the importance of having self-awareness and an internalized moral perspective, as well as being transparent and open to opposing viewpoints. These social cues will be seen as salient and can influence subordinates so that they develop particular attitudes about their leader and organization and behave in a way that is consistent with these attitudes. Among many attitudinal reactions subordinates may develop, we focus on value internalization and affective commitment as indicators of a cognitive mechanism and an affective mechanism. Value internalization is examined because subordinates are likely to mirror their authentic leader's display of an internalized moral perspective. Affective commitment is also investigated because authentic leaders may increase subordinate emotional attachment through the provision of emotional support (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2005).

Overall, we attempt to make three theoretical contributions to the authentic leadership literature. First, we highlight subordinate sportsmanship behavior as a plausible and proximal subordinate behavioral outcome of authentic leadership that can further benefit task performance. Second, drawing on social information processing theory, we identify two attitudinal reactions (a cognitive one—value internalization, and an affective one—affectional commitment) to authentic leadership. Third, we answer the call from Edwards and Berry (2010) to promote increased theoretical precision by predicting and then testing differential mediating effects for value internalization and affectional commitment in our model.

Theory and Hypotheses

Authentic Leadership

The notion of authenticity in leadership dates back to the early 1980s, when Henderson and Hoy (1982) provided a definition and developed a measure of leader authenticity. In their conceptualization, leader authenticity refers to “the extent to which subordinates perceive their leader to be maximizing the acceptance of organizational and personal responsibility for actions, outcomes, and mistakes; to be non-manipulating of subordinates; and to demonstrate a salience of self over role” (p. 6).

More recently, Bass and Steidlmeier’s (1999) discussion of authentic transformational leadership stimulated the development of authentic leadership theory as distinct from the more established stream of transformational leadership research. Luthans and Avolio (2003) were the first to conceptualize authentic leadership as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (p. 243).

Specifically, authentic leaders know who they are, what they think, and how they behave, and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004). From a practitioner’s point of view, Bill George (2003) also provided a definition in his book, *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*, suggesting that the key attributes of an authentic leader are purpose, meaning, values, relationships, and self-discipline (Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005).

According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), authentic leaders engage in four related behaviors: *Self-awareness* is represented by demonstrating that leaders are cognizant of their impact on other people; *Relational transparency* involves disclosing, openly sharing information, and expressing their true thoughts and feelings; *Internalized moral perspective* refers to an internalized and integrated form of self-regulation, which results in consistency between their values and actions; *Balanced processing* involves objectively analyzing all relevant data before coming to a decision. Taken together, this pattern of leader behaviors provides a relational base for subordinate performance enhancement (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005).

Authentic Leadership, Sportsmanship, and Subordinate Task Performance

Task performance is typically evaluated based on a person's accomplishment of their in-role tasks. Thus, to understand the workings of the authentic leadership—subordinate task performance relationship, it is critical to first understand what actions (behaviors) subordinates tend to display when their leaders are considered authentic. This should help reveal behavioral mediators linking authentic leadership and employee task performance.

In pursuing continued high performance, it is desired that employees possess sustained motivation and tenacity, so that they perform no matter how imperfect their work environment may be. When employees display persistent focus on their daily work behaviors, they are less likely to be overwhelmed by distractions and stay work-focused. We argue that this type of subordinate behavior is a likely product of authentic leadership. Possessing self-awareness, authentic leaders know their impact on subordinates, and they are therefore inclined to act in an attentive and fair way so that employees do not feel badly treated or develop complaints. Rather, by virtue of internalized morality and decisional transparency (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), authentic leaders engender a process through which their subordinates are likely to evaluate their treatment to be morally sound. This clearly provides a favorable psychological environment in which subordinates can develop positive work attitudes, tolerate unfavorable work conditions, maintain balanced interpersonal relationships, avoid complaints and immoral conduct, and persistently stay focused on-task.

These above behavioral expressions are highly similar to what has been called “sportsmanship” (Organ, 1990; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990) in organizational research. “A good sport” persistently maintains a positive attitude even when things do not go their way (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Although sportsmanship as an outcome originated in OCB research (Organ, 1988), research that has included sportsmanship and other OCBs (e.g., altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, civic virtue) has suggested that sportsmanship could have different and unique antecedents (Podsakoff et al., 2000). As an outcome of authentic leadership, subordinate sportsmanship is not simply a form of morally obligated citizenship (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006) or extra-role behaviors (Marinova, Moon, & Van Dyne, 2010) for the sake of others. Rather, sportsmanship is an expression of positivity by choosing to not do things that distort reality and are harmful to organizational functioning (e.g., complaining and overexaggerating an unfavorable environment). Exhibiting sportsmanship also saves time, conserves stamina, and enables people to focus on constructive goal-oriented effort (Organ et al., 2006), enhancing the vitality with which they perform their in-role tasks. Thus, sportsmanship can be indispensable for subordinate sustainable task performance.

We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There will a positive indirect effect of authentic leadership on subordinate task performance via subordinate display of sportsmanship.

Authentic Leadership and Subordinate Sportsmanship—Dual Processes

The social information processing perspective (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) has argued that salient, relevant, and credible environmental information is used to form receivers' attitudes and to direct their subsequent behaviors through evaluation and choice processes (Zalesny & Ford, 1990). In the following section, we expand our model by advancing two psychological attitude formation processes that may mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and subordinate sportsmanship.

Value Internalization and Affective Commitment as Two Attitudinal Mediators

Avolio et al. (2004) have asserted that authentic leaders act as role models, display high moral standards, honesty and integrity. These leader behaviors and characteristics will be perceived and then used as social cues to direct a sense-making process by subordinates. For example, based on cognitive processes, subordinates may define themselves in terms of their relational identity and group memberships, and therefore identify with both their leader and their organization (Avolio et al., 2004).

By the same token, authentic leaders may trigger subordinate affective processes that make it more likely that subordinates will feel emotionally attached to the leader or/and the organization. Researchers have suggested that authentic leaders can increase subordinate positive emotions and reduce subordinate negative emotions through the provision of emotional support (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2005). When employees are experiencing positive rather than negative emotions, they are more able to cope with and overcome difficult periods of stress and vulnerability and are more likely to achieve higher performance.

We further contribute to the authentic leadership literature by articulating alternative cognitive and affective mechanisms. Although identification process explanations have dominated authentic leadership theory and research, value internalization processes should also be examined. According to the social influence literature (Kelman, 1958), internalization and identification are two qualitatively different processes. Identification occurs when an individual accepts the influence of another because he or she wants to associate with him or her. In contrast, internalization is said to occur when an individual accepts influence because the behavior is congruent with his or her value system (Kelman, 1958).

Luthans and Avolio (2003) have noted that authentic leaders are guided by a set of values that emphasize doing "what is right and fair," and they act in a transparent way when dealing with their subordinates. These particular social cues will evoke subordinates' positive attitudes about the leader by recognizing that they both share similar values that are important and righteous (Avolio et al., 2004). The more similar their values, the more a tacit mutual understanding will be achieved between leaders and their subordinates. Therefore, subordinates will be more willing to make the best of situations, instead of finding fault with the leader and/or organization and embarrassing the leader when the environment is less than favorable.

An affective-based response to authentic leadership can also occur at the same time. Different from the short-term positive emotions that are experienced immediately after interacting with an authentic leader, subordinates can develop enduring positive feelings about a leader and their membership in an organization.

Since authentic leaders are seen as “objective” (i.e., as considering all relevant evidence in making decisions) and transparent, employees under such supervisors would be expected to worry less about possible unfair treatment or organizational politics. Rather, their leader’s behavior is likely to be interpreted as signaling that the organization values integrity and fair treatment. Therefore, employees are very likely to develop a sense of belongingness and an emotional attachment to the organization. This attitude represents one’s affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1984), defined as “an affective or emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual is involved in, and enjoys membership in, the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 2).

Although previous research has suggested that citizenship behavior can be affectively determined (Organ & Konovsky, 1989), we are not aware of any study that has considered the specific effect of an affective-based attitude (e.g., affective commitment) on subordinate sportsmanship behavior. We find such a possibility intriguing and thus argue that sportsmanship may be partially affective-driven. Experiencing positive affectivity should be associated with demonstrating sportsmanship because sportsmanship, as a positive behavior, may simply be one manifestation of positive affect.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Authentic leadership transmits its effects on subordinate sportsmanship by engendering two psychological processes: (a) value internalization and (b) affective commitment.

Comparing Mediating Effects

Edwards and Berry (2010) have called for increased precision in the testing of theoretical models and hypotheses. They suggest that one way of promoting such precision is by testing predictive comparisons (e.g., that one effect will be greater than another). Therefore, in the current context, an important question is whether the two mechanisms discussed above—value internalization (a product of cognitive attitude formation processes) and affective commitment (a product of affective attitude formation processes)—are equally important in impacting subordinate sportsmanship behavior.

We posit that the process of value internalization is more predictive of the display of sportsmanship than that of affective commitment. We offer three possible explanations for our prediction. First, sportsmanship can be seen as a result of a social learning process through which subordinates adopt and internalize the values of their authentic leaders. From a social informational processing perspective, social learning can be seen as an explanatory mechanism between the acquisition of social information and the expression of behavior (Zalesny & Ford, 1990). For example, subordinates draw inferences about what type of person the leader is, why the leader acts in certain ways, and what they (themselves) should do to respond. Once subordinates become aware of the authenticity displayed by their leaders, they internalize these values, and end up behaving in a similar positive manner. This process is deliberate and involves reasoning. It has been proposed that attitudes formed on the basis of inferences or attributions

should be strong and especially predictive of future behavior (Zalesny & Ford, 1990). Therefore, even though affective commitment can transmit the effects of authentic leadership, value internalization—a cognitive process—should be more predictive of the display of sportsmanship than affective commitment.

Second, the literature suggests that attitudes which people consider personally important exert an especially strong influence on their behavior (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995). For attitude-expressive behaviors in particular, more important attitudes serve as more powerful guides. Sportsmanship is such an attitude-expressive behavior. Being a good sport, people express their attitudes about a less than ideal work environment in an overtly or implicitly positive way (rather than complaining about trivial issues and making “mountains out of molehills”). In determining the extent to which a subordinate displays sportsmanship, the congruence of his or her personal values with those of the leader seem more personally important than his or her general feelings about the organization. As a result, the internalization of leader values should be more important in explaining how sportsmanship develops than feelings about the organization.

Third, an attitude becomes more important when the object is closely tied to an individual’s values (Boninger et al., 1995). By internalizing an authentic leader’s values, subordinates will weigh work values, such as authenticity, integrity, and justice (Kiersch & Byrne, 2015), when they perform their own tasks. It has been suggested that being a good sportsman is most likely to be driven by personal values (Marinova et al., 2010), and is also likely to occur due to justice perceptions (Rioux & Penner, 2001). Subordinates who have internalized an authentic leader’s values are more likely to behave as good sports. Endlessly complaining or being “perpetual squeaky wheels” will be seen as contrary to their values or beliefs. In contrast, affective commitment is a less-deliberate emotional attachment process, and it is not clear whether such a positive feeling is value-related. Thus, even though authentic leaders are able to advance subordinate affective commitment, its subsequent effect on employee sportsmanship behavior is arguably weaker when compared with a cognitive value internalization process. We therefore hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: In the relationship between authentic leadership and subordinate sportsmanship, the specific mediating effect through value internalization is stronger than the specific mediating effect through affective commitment.

Schematics of the hypothesized model are shown in Figure 1.

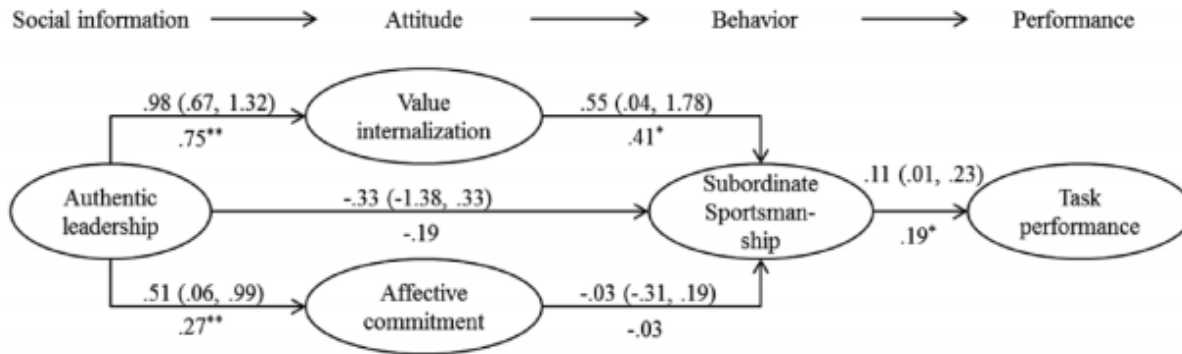


Figure 1. Hypothesized model^{a,b}.

^aError terms and statistical controls for common method variance are not shown for the model.

^bUnstandardized path coefficients are shown above the arrows, with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) in parentheses. Standardized path coefficients are shown below the arrows (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$).

Method

Participants and Procedure

In an attempt to increase the variability of the measures, survey data were collected from six organizations in a wide range of industries (retail, food manufacturing, health care, construction, information technology, and telecommunication) in China. The CEO or one of the top management team members of each organization was contacted. A list of randomly selected supervisors and their subordinates was provided by the organization. Since the phenomena we were interested in occurred at the individual level, we purposefully designed the study so that group effects would be kept to a minimum (a test of the appropriate level of analysis is provided in the results section). For each supervisor, only one to three (in two cases, four) subordinates were chosen. One of the authors visited these organizations, and distributed the questionnaire to each participant in a sealed envelope, with the help of at least one HR officer. Supervisor and subordinate data were matched immediately on receiving their completed surveys.

A total of 203 valid leader-subordinate dyads from 203 subordinates and their 101 direct supervisors were successfully obtained. The average age of the subordinates was 30.6 years ($SD = 7.4$), and the average age of their supervisors was 35.8 years ($SD = 8.1$). The average dyadic tenure was 39 months ($SD = 45.6$). A total of 43.8% of the subordinates were female, and 60.1% had a bachelor degree or higher. Among the supervisors, 33.7% were female, and 72.3% had a bachelor degree or higher.

Measures

Seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) were used for all the measures except for the task performance measure. All instruments that had not been previously translated into Chinese were translated and back-translated into Chinese to assure the English-Chinese equivalency of the items (Brislin, 1986).

Authentic Leadership

Neider and Schriesheim's (2011) 14-item Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI) was employed to assess the subordinates' perception of their direct leaders ($\alpha = .94$). This instrument was developed to include four subscales measuring a leader's behaviors in four domains: self-awareness (3 items, $\alpha = .82$), relational transparency (3 items, $\alpha = .80$), internalized moral perspective (4 items, $\alpha = .83$), and balanced processing (4 items, $\alpha = .83$). Substantial psychometric support for this measure is contained in Neider and Schriesheim (2011). Of the 14 items, eight had been previously translated into Chinese and used in the Chinese context (e.g., Wang, Sui, Luthans, Wang, & Wu, 2014). The remaining six items were translated and back-translated following Brislin's (1986) procedure.

Value internalization was assessed with two items adapted from Shamir, Zakay, Breinin, and Popper's (1998) broad measure of subordinate identification with and trust in the leader. Two items representing value internalization were used. Subordinates were asked to rate the extent to which their values are congruent with their leaders—"He/she represents values that are important to me" and "My values are similar to his/her values" ($\alpha = .82$).

Affective commitment was assessed with the six-item measure developed by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993; $\alpha = .91$). Sample items are "I feel emotionally attached to this organization" and "I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization."

Subordinate sportsmanship was measured with the five-item measure developed by Podsakoff and colleagues (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996; $\alpha = .77$). Leaders were asked to rate each participating subordinate's sportsmanship behavior. Sample items are "Consumes a lot of time complaining about trivial matters" and "Always finds fault with what the organization is doing." All items were reverse-scored, following the authors' original scoring procedure.

Subordinate task performance was rated by their leaders using three items, one assessing each subordinate's in-role performance in three domains: (1) production quantity, (2) production quality, and (3) production efficiency ($\alpha = .83$). A 5-point Likert-type scale was employed for each item. The production efficiency question was, "Does this person seem to get maximum output from the resources (time, materials, equipment, supplies, etc.) he/she has available? That is, how efficiently does he/she do his/her work?" The response choices were the following: 5 = *extremely efficient*, 4 = *very efficient*, 3 = *fairly efficient*, 2 = *not too efficient*, and 1 = *not efficient at all*." This measure was based on research conducted by Mott (1972) and originally consisted of seven items (which have been used in a number of previous studies; e.g., Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998). The four items that were omitted were deleted because they assess task behavior rather than task performance (e.g., the omitted adaptation item is, "How well does this person do in anticipating problems that may come up in the future and preventing them from occurring or minimizing them"). We felt that this was an important adjustment to avoid possibly confounding our task performance measure with our sportsmanship measure.

Analytical Approach

First, a series of confirmatory factor analyses were performed to ensure that our operational measures are distinct from each other. Second, before hypotheses testing, we detected and controlled for common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) that might inflate observed correlations between the variables of interest. Third, in testing hypotheses, we adopted a structural equation modeling approach and performed bootstrapping¹ (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004) to more rigorously draw inferences about the magnitude of the obtained indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), while using contrasts to compare different indirect effects.

Results

Measurement Model

To begin with, we performed confirmatory factor analyses using Mplus 6.11 to assess the factor structure of the five study variables: authentic leadership, value internalization, affective commitment, sportsmanship, and task performance. Based on MacCallum, Widaman, Zhang, and Hong's (1999) discussion of the sample size issue in factor analysis, our sample of approximately 200 was not considered adequate because a wide range of factor loadings was observed (this resulted in a wide range of communalities, from .36 to .85). Therefore, subscales and item parcels were used for variables with more than five items (i.e., authentic leadership and affective commitment). Consistent with Wang et al.'s (2014) measurement structure, the four authentic leadership subscale scores were used as indicators of this latent leadership construct. Additionally, using Little, Cunningham, Shahar, and Widaman's (2002) approach to examining "item-to-construct relations," we anchored three item parcels as indicators of the affective commitment latent variable.² As shown in Table 1, the proposed five-factor model with correlated factors and uncorrelated error provided a good fit to the data, both by itself, $\chi^2(109) = 199.86, p < .05$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .96; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .95; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04, and compared with the four rival models. This suggests discriminant validity among the measures of our variables.³

¹ Bootstrapping is a nonparametric resampling method that does not assume normality of an indirect effect's distribution (which is assumed by traditional significance tests). Compared with other methods of testing mediating effects, bootstrapping generally obtains more accurate confidence limits for indirect effects, with bias-corrected bootstrapping considered best in terms of Type I error rates and statistical power (MacKinnon et al., 2004).

² Following Little et al.'s (2002) suggestion, we first examined the difficulty and discrimination of the six original items, and found the mean levels of the items were of no concern, so the item-to-construct relations were examined to build balanced parcels.

³ We also tested the measurement model without using subdimension scores and item parcels—using items only. Specifically, we used 14 items as indicators of a latent authentic leadership variable, and six items as indicators of a latent affective commitment variable. This model, with correlated factors and uncorrelated error, provided a reasonable fit to the data, $\chi^2(395) = 741.94, p < .05$; CFI = .91; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .05. The model modification indices suggested that by correlating a few errors for the authentic leadership items, better model fit could be achieved. However, we chose not to construct our measurement model this way in the subsequent hypotheses tests because by doing so a much greater number of parameters had to be estimated with a relatively small sample. To ensure that our hypotheses testing results were not distorted by using a measurement model with subdimension scores and item parcels, all the hypotheses were again tested in a structural equation model where only items were used. The results remained as they are reported herein and can be obtained from the authors on request.

Table 1. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses of Five Measurement Models.

	<i>df</i>	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Baseline 5-factor model	109	199.86		.96	.95	.06	.04
4-Factor model: VI and AC combined	113	395.91	196.05***	.87	.84	.11	.08
4-Factor model: SS and TP combined	113	369.77	169.91***	.88	.85	.11	.07
3-Factor model: AL, VI, and AC combined	116	487.57	287.71***	.82	.80	.13	.07
2-Factor model: AL, VI, and AC combined, and SS and TP combined	118	657.20	457.34***	.74	.70	.15	.09

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; VI = value internalization; AC = affective commitment; SS = subordinate sportsmanship; TP = task performance; AL = authentic leadership. *** $p < .001$.

Detection and Control of Common Method Variance

As identified by Podsakoff et al. (2003), leniency biases, defined as “the propensity for respondents to attribute socially desirable traits, attitudes, and/or behaviors to someone they know and like than to someone they dislike,” tend to produce spurious correlations. It is likely that the observed relationships among variables rated by the same person are inflated due to the effect of liking (or disliking). The affect component of leader–member exchange (LMX-Affect, conceptualized as “the mutual affection members of the dyad have for each other based primarily on interpersonal attraction, rather than work or professional values”; Liden & Maslyn, 1998, p. 46) was thus used as a measure of leniency bias. Both subordinates’ LMX-Affect (subordinates’ liking of their leaders) and supervisors’ LMX-Affect (SLMX-Affect; supervisors’ liking of their subordinates) were directly measured with three items (Liden & Maslyn, 1998; $\alpha = .91$ for LMX-Affect and $\alpha = .89$ for SLMX-Affect). Method bias was examined by fitting a measurement model in which the indicators of the substantive variables (authentic leadership, value internalization, affective commitment, sportsmanship, and task performance) were allowed to load on one of the directly measured latent method factors (LMX-Affect or SLMX-Affect) according to who was the rater (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This model fit the data well, $\chi^2(202) = 364.12$, $p < .05$; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .05). All factor loadings of the substantive indicators on the latent method variables were significant, suggesting potential method variance effects. Therefore, LMX-Affect and SLMX-Affect were used in subsequent models to control for common method variance when our hypotheses were tested.

Table 2. Variable Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities^a.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Authentic leadership	5.63	0.80	(.94)						
2. Value internalization	5.57	0.99	.78**	(.82)					
3. Affective commitment	5.52	1.03	.55**	.54**	(.91)				
4. Sportsmanship	5.86	0.85	.14†	.22**	.11	(.77)			
5. Task performance	3.64	0.68	.14†	.18*	.10	.35**	(.83)		
6. LMX-Affect	5.76	0.94	.74**	.63**	.52**	.11	.17*	(.91)	
7. SLMX-Affect	5.47	0.94	.14*	.18**	.11	.37**	.56**	.16*	(.89)

^a $N = 203$. Coefficient alphas are shown in parentheses in the diagonal. Note. LMX = subordinate-rated leader–member exchange; SLMX = supervisor-rated leader–member exchange. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Means, standard deviations, bivariate zero-order correlations, and reliabilities of the study variables are presented in Table 2.

Levels of Analysis

Because some individual employees in our sample were nested within leaders, we tested for possible statistical dependence with analysis of variance. A series of *F* tests indicated that the between-level variances for all variables, except for sportsmanship, were not significant, supporting the use of an individual level of analysis in this study.

Hypotheses Testing

We constructed the model shown in Figure 1. In this model, authentic leadership is related to sportsmanship and task performance (Hypothesis 1) through two concurrent processes—value internalization (Hypothesis 2a) and affective commitment (Hypothesis 2b). In testing this three-path multiple-mediator model (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Taylor, MacKinnon, & Tein, 2008), we examined not only overall model fit, but also specific indirect effects and pairwise contrasts of the indirect effects using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Noting that an indirect effect is not normally distributed (MacKinnon et al., 2004), traditional single parameter significance tests should not be used, but instead the obtained coefficients should be reported in unstandardized form with 95% confidence intervals (CIs).

Our model (Figure 1) provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(205) = 364.93, p < .05$; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .05. The total indirect effect of authentic leadership on subordinate sportsmanship was positive (point estimate = .53; 95% CI [.05, 1.74]), and sportsmanship was positively related to task performance (point estimate = .11; 95% CI [.01, .23]). Overall, the total indirect effect of authentic leadership on task performance mediated by sportsmanship was positive (point estimate = .06; 95% CI [.003, .27]), thus supporting Hypothesis 1. An examination of the specific indirect effects linking authentic leadership and sportsmanship showed that value internalization did mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and sportsmanship (point estimate = .54; 95% CI [.05, 1.83]), supporting Hypothesis 2a. Affective commitment failed to transmit the effect of authentic leadership to sportsmanship (point estimate = $-.02$; 95% CI [$-.19$, .07]), not supporting Hypothesis 2b. Furthermore, we examined two specific three-path mediating effects to ascertain that the relationship between authentic leadership and task performance was mediated by our proposed mediators. Specifically, the indirect effect of authentic leadership on subordinate task performance through value internalization and sportsmanship (in sequence) was .06, with a 95% CI excluding zero [.003, .27], whereas the indirect effect via affective commitment and sportsmanship (in sequence) was not statistically different from zero (point estimate = $-.002$; 95% CI [$-.03$, .01]). Collectively, these suggest that in our proposed model, value internalization seems to be a significant mediating mechanism while affective commitment did not contribute above and beyond the effect of value internalization.

Having supported the role that value internalization played in mediating the relationship between authentic leadership and sportsmanship, we performed a contrast analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to increase the precision of our theoretical predictions by comparing the two specific

mediating effects (testing Hypothesis 3; Edwards & Berry, 2010). As expected, the specific indirect effect of authentic leadership on subordinate sportsmanship through value internalization was larger than the indirect effect through affective commitment (point estimate = .56), with a 95% confidence interval of .01 to 1.92. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported. Table 3 presents a summary of the results discussed above.

Table 3. Multiple Mediating Effects of Authentic Leadership on Subordinate Sportsmanship and Task Performance^a.

	Sportsmanship			Task performance		
	Point estimate	Bootstrapping BC 95% CI		Point estimate	Bootstrapping BC 95% CI	
		Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper
	Indirect effects			Indirect effects		
Value internalization	.54	.05	1.83	.06	.003	.27
Affective commitment	-.02	-.19	.10	-.002	-.03	.01
Sum of indirect	.53	.05	1.74	.06	.003	.27
	Contrast			Contrast		
Value internalization versus affective commitment	.56	.01	1.92	.06	.001	.28

Note. BC = bias-corrected 95% confidence interval (CI).

^a See Figure 1 for schematics of the hypothesized model; *N* = 203

Discussion

Our central thesis in this study is that authentic leadership influences subordinate attitude, behavior, and task performance in sequence, as suggested by social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Zalesny & Ford, 1990). Our results indicate that authentic leaders may trigger two psychological processes (i.e., value internalization and affective commitment) in subordinates. However, only value internalization contributes uniquely to subordinates' display of sportsmanship—a behavior that is indicative of positivity and objectivity, and that is especially likely to be associated with authentic leadership. Those who show a high level of sportsmanship will perform their jobs better, as evidenced by higher levels of quality, quantity, and efficiency.

Our study contributes to the authentic leadership literature in several major ways. First, we explicitly specify that subordinate sportsmanship is a behavioral outcome that is associated with authentic leadership. Indicative of employees' demonstration of positivity and objectivity in a persistent manner, sportsmanship seems to be the most theoretically justifiable behavioral reaction to authentic leaders who are said to promote positive psychological capacities (Walumbwa et al., 2008). "Good sports" have stronger perseverance in less than ideal environments—they do not waste their time on trivial matters, and they tend to see things in a more positive and balanced way. Therefore, they are less likely to be distracted while working toward task accomplishment. Since such task-focused behavior saves time and conserves stamina, these "good sports" are likely to be more productive in performing their in-role tasks, especially given the existence of time constraints. In sum, our choice of sportsmanship as a mediator explaining the relationship between authentic leadership and employee task performance is theory-driven. Here, the role of sportsmanship differs dramatically from what has

historically been labeled as citizenship (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Podsakoff et al., 1996), which is more of an employee behavior that arises from the norm of reciprocity.

One may argue that the positivity involved in sportsmanship appears similar to the “resilience” and “optimism” dimensions of the construct of psychological capital (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). However, psychological capital is conceptualized as one’s self-reported positive psychological state rather than other-evaluated and externally observed work behavior. Its subdimensions—resilience and optimism—again represent one’s positive psychological capabilities that can help individuals recover from adversity or make positive attributions now and in the future. We therefore see little theoretical basis for arguing that sportsmanship and psychological capital draw on the same theoretical tenets and are thus mutually substitutable.

We also make contributions in applying social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) to study of authentic leadership influence processes. Past studies on authentic leadership have either developed their own authentic leadership theory or based their research on self-theory, identity theory, or a positive psychology framework (Gardner et al., 2011). Little attention has been paid to the fact that authentic leadership serves as social cues that are used by subordinates to make sense of and learn from their leaders. We thus provide researchers with an integrated perspective for examining how authentic leadership helps to enhance subordinate task performance through triggering certain attitudes and behavioral manifestations.

Third, our study also informs authentic leadership research on the psychological processes through which subordinates develop personally important attitudes that direct future work behavior. We hypothesized that value internalization (a cognitive process), and affective commitment (an affective process), may serve as two mechanisms to transmit the effects of authentic leadership. Although our results failed to support the mediating effect of affective commitment when value internalization was present, value internalization alone has been shown to be a significant mediator. Our result is in line with predictions in the attitude importance literature (Boninger et al., 1995) and with research on social influence (Kelman, 1958). Moreover, our emphasis on value internalization as a deliberate cognitive process fills a gap in previous authentic leadership studies which focused primarily on the effect of identification mechanisms (Avolio et al., 2004).

Managerial Implications

Our findings suggest that by performing the leadership role with a high level of self-awareness, clearly expressing their true thoughts and feelings to their subordinates, showing consistency between their values and actions, and making decisions only after objectively analyzing all relevant information, authentic leaders are able to trigger subordinates’ positive cognitive and affective reactions. Specifically, subordinates will consciously realize that their values are more congruent with their leaders’, while developing an emotional attachment to the organization. Subsequently, these subordinates will display a high level of sportsmanship, which is extremely useful when the organization is undergoing change, or when the general work environment (such as the physical working conditions or organizational culture) is less than favorable for task performance. Managers should encourage sportsmanship in the organization because good sports are likely to be more engaged and persistent in pursuing excellence.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to qualify the contributions of this study in light of its limitations. First, cross-sectional data limit our ability to assert causality between authentic leadership and subordinate performance. In particular, although our sequential mediating model was proposed using social information processing theory and was largely supported by the data, it is not possible to rule out plausible alternative explanations without a longitudinal or experimental research design. For example, research on attitude change (e.g., self-perception theory; Bem, 1972) has posited that people may develop attitudes based on what they have done. Therefore, it is possible that when someone has demonstrated sportsmanship through directly learning from an authentic leader, he or she will justify such a behavior by changing his/her attitudes. With that said, if this person experienced dissonance between an attitude and the display of sportsmanship, he or she might later develop a positive work attitude (i.e., positive affectivity toward the organization) that is more consistent with the nature of sportsmanship. This may explain why affective commitment did not serve as a significant mediator in our model—the alternative would be that sportsmanship precedes affective commitment. This alternative may pave the way for further examining the power of authentic leadership in changing subordinates' attitudes through shaping their behavioral patterns first.

Second, productivity rated by supervisors may be subject to cognitive bias (e.g., halo effect) that operates as a confounding factor in the relationship between sportsmanship behavior and task performance. We used a three-item scale to measure the quantity, quality, and efficiency of task performance so as to focus on only performance outcomes rather than high-performance behaviors (e.g., adaptation). Moreover, through our modeling of rater effects, the effects of such a bias were statistically controlled. Nevertheless, to better understand the extent to which authentic leadership helps to enhance subordinate task performance, future research should consider collecting objective performance data.

Third, while other prior studies have typically treated OCB as a holistic concept (Walumbwa et al., 2008), and investigated overall subordinate OCB as a consequence of authentic leadership, this study may be the first to examine sportsmanship alone as a behavioral outcome pertinent to authentic leadership. Although we have provided theoretical arguments that support sportsmanship as a distinctive behavior that is different from other OCBs, more supportive empirical evidence is certainly desirable. In a preliminary attempt to at least partially address this issue, we tested four alternative models that substituted the four additional OCBs proposed by Podsakoff and his associates (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Podsakoff et al., 1996; conscientiousness, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism) in our hypothesized model. The results demonstrated that none of the four were significant in explaining the relationship between authentic leadership and subordinate task performance.⁴ Thus, none of the other four citizenship behaviors seemed to be the result of value internalization or affective commitment arising after interacting with an authentic leader. Therefore, our results not only provide further justification of our theoretical model, but also suggest that the structure of OCB may merit further theoretical and empirical examination.

⁴ Results can be obtained from the authors.

Conclusion

We contribute to the authentic leadership literature by theoretically constructing and empirically testing a social information processing model to explain why authentic leadership helps enhance subordinate task performance. Our results demonstrate that a specific cognitive process—value internalization—plays a central role, resulting in subordinates' display of high levels of sportsmanship that are beneficial to productivity. Overall, we hope that the present study helps stimulate increased interest in examining the role that authentic leadership plays in facilitating organizational functioning and leadership effectiveness.

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